

Noor Amiri is an Afghan, a Muslim, and a friend of the United States.

He's also a refugee, forced to leave his homeland because his job was to assist the United States armed forces and the Afghan forces who were fighting the Taliban.

"I was working shoulder by shoulder with U.S. and Afghan forces to bring safety and peace to Afghanistan," he says. "That was my goal."

Now 27, Amiri was a young boy when the Taliban seized his hometown of Kabul. When the Taliban was driven out with the help of the United States military, he was in his teens. He began learning English and became interested in learning about other cultures. . At 21, he began working for the U.S. Military, initially as an instructor for the Afghan National Army and then later as an interpreter for both U.S. and Afghan forces. In his role he traveled with military convoys, helping to gather intelligence and protect the U.S. forces in Afghanistan from ambushes and roadside Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).

As an interpreter, he was a huge target for "the bad guys" –the Taliban forces.

Five years ago, the U.S. began withdrawing troops from Afghanistan, and while Amiri was used to having a dangerous job, he was worried.

"After the U.S. Army tried to withdraw, we didn't feel safe," he says. Some other interpreters for the Americans had been killed, "in the bad way," he says –their heads cut off to send a message to the rest.

He had a wife and a young son to consider, so late in 2012 Amiri applied for refugee status. A paperwork glitch meant his application was denied, so he tried again through the Special Immigrant Visa program that was available to Afghan transactors who served with the military. The visa was granted, and in June of 2014, Amiri and his very pregnant wife and 3-year-old son flew to New York City and learned that their new home would be in Columbia, S.C, where they were assisted Lutheran Services Carolinas.

The first months were tough and lonely, but Amiri's family began to adjust. They met some other Afghan families and Amiri found a job working at Car Max.

Now, Amiri and his family feel more at home.

"Life is getting easier and easier," he says. "We are feeling safe, and that's the best part."

He believes his children, Mustafa, 5, and Mojtaba (Yama), not yet 2, will have a bright future.

Amiri is now working for LSC.

"My job is to find volunteers, especially former refugees, to help the new arrivals," he said. Ultimately, everyone's goal is to help the refugees become confident, self-sufficient members of the community.

"It's been great," Amiri says. "I'm feeling that I'm useful to the LSC case managers and to refugees."